



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

ST MICHAEL'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL 130TH ANNIVERSARY

Wednesday 23 April 2025

Acknowledgments

Andrew Eddy, Chair of the Board, and **Gerard Houlihan**, Head of the School, St Michael's Grammar School

Teachers and staff

I begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this building stands – the Bunurong people of the Eastern Kulin Nation – and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

As someone who has spent a significant amount of time in academia, I'm delighted to join you tonight to reflect on the role of education in empowering people to contribute to their communities.

I found myself in a career in academia not because I had planned to, but because I actively pursued what I cared about.

Early in my term as Vice Chancellor and President of RMIT, I had the privilege of learning from 'my' first Chancellor, Professor Dennis Gibson – one of the most significant Vice Chancellors of those remarkable Dawkins years in Australian higher education.

He was the first Vice Chancellor of QUT and founder of the ATN group – a group that recently celebrated its 25th anniversary.

Dennis gave me a novel by J.C. Masterman titled "To Teach the Senators Wisdom".

This wry and perceptive unpacking of what made Oxford University great (written in the 1950s) still resonates today, because it addresses fundamental questions that continue to be, and should be, central to not only the future of universities, but also secondary and primary education.

Masterman comments:

"... [that every year when the new class arrives] ...the great age dawns for them and the golden years begin.

We're here to help them if we can, not to impose our standards and our views and our rules of conduct upon them.... [F]or each individual it is a different secret – and each must find it for [themselves] [sic]"

Masterman's insights remind us that true learning isn't about imposing answers, but about fostering an environment where individuals can discover their own paths to understanding.

His view that universities should nurture individual discovery echoes St Michael's emphasis on nurturing "creative, inquiring minds learning from, with and for the world."

As we look across the 130-year history of your school, it's fair to say that much has altered – the curriculum taught by teachers, the diversity of the students, and the quality of facilities and classrooms.

What has remained constant is that access to education creates opportunity.

It allows us to find new ways of understanding and responding to the world, even as that world changes around us.

As educators, it is your responsibility to equip students with the tools to discover their own 'secret' to understanding, as Masterman described it.

That is the biggest gift you can give anyone – and that is always what we’re asking for from education.

It’s important to note that this is a two-way process, requiring an exploration from both the student and the teacher.

Maria Montessori, the Italian educator who influenced so much of early education, said of teaching that:

"The greatest sign of success for a teacher... is to be able to say, 'The children are now working as if I did not exist.'"

That is what you’re looking to create – those moments of discovery that are all theirs, where you were just part of providing that opportunity and environment for them to find it for themselves.

I’m sure that for every staff member and teacher here, Maria Montessori’s words will resonate.

The stark reality is that predicting the future contributions of a student is near impossible.

To prove my point, I’d encourage you to reflect on your own years as a student.

Being young and excitable tends to endear us to the rebellious – but that is not necessarily a bad thing.

The heart of rebellion is well and truly guided by passion and deep-thought – something that should always be encouraged in students.

Because we do not possess a crystal ball, we can only focus on one element – and that is the here and now.

It is always easy to talk about the future, but what is most important is ensuring that students find the joy in the now.

They will get the best out of their education while they're enjoying and exploring the present and taking all the opportunities of the moment.

That's almost the best preparation for their future that they can ever have.

We cannot predict what contributions these students will make, and that was not my role in education, nor is it yours.

The task at hand for any educator or staff member is to equip students with the tools, the support and the understanding to make that contribution – whatever it may be.

As Masterman said, "*the great age dawns for them*" – and you have the great privilege to facilitate that dawn for every student who comes through these doors.

It is a sacred duty, an incredibly important responsibility, and one that we can all uniquely recall being on the receiving end of.

Just as you have made such a significant contribution with your education, so will they.

I'd like to thank and congratulate staff and teachers of St. Michael's Grammar School on your 130th anniversary, and wish you all the best for the years to come.

Thank you.